ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

READER.

THE Author of theſe following Sheets, through his extreme Modeſty, cannot be prevailed upon, to let his Name be aſcribed to them; but I do aſſure you, He is a Learned and a Pious Divine of the *Eſtabliſhed Church of England*; One that hath been deeply ſenſible of, and affected with, the lamentable Breaches and Diviſions in the Church of God, made and kept up by the deſigned Artifices of too many amongſt us, who have been induſtriouſly labouring, for this laſt *Century*, to undermine and deſtroy her. He now heartily rejoyces to ſee ſo happy an *Agreement* begun to be ſet on foot by any ſort of Chriſtians, in laying aſide their particular and needleſs Diſputes; and hopes, and daily prays, That we may (all of us) be perſuaded, *in this our day, to mind the things that make for the Churches Peace*; conſidering, *That whoſoever ſincerely loves God, cannot but love his Brother alſo.*

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FREE THOUGHTS

Occaſioned by the

Heads of Agreement

Aſſented to by the

UNITED MINISTERS

In and about LONDON;

Formerly called

Presbyterian and Congregational.

To Love is to believe, to hope, to know;
'Tis an Eſſay, a Taſte of Heaven below:
Could we forbear Diſpute, and practice Love,
We ſhould agree as Angels do above.

Mr. *Waller's* 3*d* Cant. of Divine Love.

LICENS'D, *Sept.* 1. 1691.

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FREE THOUGHTS

Occaſioned by the

Heads of Agreement, &c.

NO ſooner had I read the *Heads of Agreement*, &c. and *Preface* to them, but, to confeſs my Free Thoughts, I could not but rejoice in what I hoped proceeded from the good Spirit of God, *whoſe fruit is love and peace*, Gal. 5. 22. Nor can any one who calls himſelf a Chriſtian, lightly eſteem of that Character, where ever 'tis found, which our beſt Maſter hath left of his Diſciples, that they *have love one for another*, Joh. 13. 35. And for my own part, I dare not but acknowledge it, where ever 'tis ſincerely aimed at, as I hope it is, by thoſe who have given themſelves the Stile of **United Miniſters**: 'Twill be a great Scandal, ſhould they cover any other Deſign with this their ſo-

lemn Profeſſion; and as great a Scandal in others, if they prove true to what they would have the world believe by this their Agreement, Not to receive what they herein profeſs, with the ſame Charity that led them to it.

For, not to enter into the ſeveral Heads there drawn up, or in the leaſt concern ones ſelf in the different points there ſpoken to, with the Doctrines or Opinions therein taught or inſinnated; the great deſign of the Accommodation, the mutual bearing with, and forbearing one another, and the giving the right hand of Fellowſhip to each other, with the diſclaiming the impoſing thoſe terms of Agreement on others, *Pref.* p. 1. is what neither as Men or Chriſtians, we can gainſay. No; it too nearly imports us to conſider, who 'tis that hath ſaid, *Bleſſed are the peace-makers*, *Matth.* 5. 9. and with them to put in for the honourable ſtile, of being call'd the *Children of God.*

All that we have to wiſh for them and our ſelves, is, That in withſtanding ſo good a work, where ever any thing offers fairly at it, none of us be found to fight againſt God: For as they have had the honour firſt to have effected what others have been ſo long deſigning and offering at, tho hitherto without the wiſh'd-for Succeſs; ſo, I hope, it may be but the beginning or pledge

(I would give it any name, whereby to provoke men to ſo laudable a Jealouſie, *Rom.* 11. 11.) of that more general Union which ought to be among all Chriſtians: 'Tis ſomething to have ſhewed us, That an Union is poſſible among thoſe who have been ſo long at ſo great a diſtance; and 'tis a good Omen at leaſt, that *Manaſſeh* ſhall not always be againſt *Ephraim*, and *Ephraim* againſt *Manaſſeh*, and they, together, againſt *Judah*, *Iſa.* 9. 21. No; 'tis very great pity, that any of thoſe who ought all to be the Sons of Peace, ſhould envy any longer, or vex one another; 'tis propheſied, they ſhall not do it, *Iſa.* 11. 13. And the expectation of the world ſeems to be upon it: Never were men ſo full of Hopes as at preſent, that it cannot be long ere the Kingdom of our Lord ſhall be advanced in the world; and what is there ſo proper a means to this, as the Love and Unity, without which it cannot flouriſh?

But to ſee now what it is may raiſe our hopes, as to the good Effects of this Agreement; what it is muſt convince us, That they who join in it, are ſincere in this excellent work of Peace.

This will be judg'd chiefly by theſe two Things:

1. The

1. The first is, Their living up among themselves, to what they so solemnly profess.

2. The second, Their taking no less care, that this their Agreement diffuse it self in a charitable and peaceable deportment towards others.

With respect to the first, they themselves have given us the Test of their Sincerity, *Pref. p.* 3. *viz.* To forbear Condemning and Disputing those different Sentiments and Practices they have expressly allowed for; To reduce all *distinguishing Names*, to that of **United Brethren**; To admit no uncharitable Jealousies, or censorious Speeches, much less any Debates whether Party seems most favoured by their present Agreement: And 'tis what very highly imports them to persevere in; God and their own Consciences will be the best Witnesses hereof, and the world will expect it from them.

And then with respect to the second, it will no less import them, to see that the Love and Charity they so much cry up among themselves, extend it self to all others; *but especially to them who are of the houshold of faith*, Gal. 6. 10.

For it is not enough for the obtaining that Peace and Concord which ought to be among Christians, for any Party or Parties to say, We

are

are agreed among our ſelves upon the common Principle of Forbearance, if at the ſame time the Diviſion is kept up as to others; the ſame jealouſies and cenſorious ſpeeches, the ſame heats and animoſities ſtill continued towards thoſe, who (to ſay no more) we cannot but own to be in the Profeſſion of the ſame Reformed Faith with us: No; this will be at the beſt to be ſtill as thoſe of whom one ſaid, *I am of Paul*; *and another*, *I am of Apollos*, 1 Cor. 3. 5. Of both whom the Apoſtle puts the Interrogation, therein including the more vehement Aſſertion, *Are ye not carnal*, *and walk as men*? v. 3.

Here therefore will be the principal thing, How watchful theſe *United Brethren* ſhall for the future be, againſt every degree of Scandal in this matter; for if it be *the love of Chriſt that conſtrains them*, 2 Cor. 5. 14. 'twill not run out to thoſe of this or the other Denomination only, but to all, whoſoever they are, whom we can charitably believe to belong to Chriſt, and to be true Members of his Church; which therefore I cannot but recommend, as what ought to be compriz'd, if not in the expreſs *Heads of Agreement*, yet at leaſt in what muſt of neceſſity come in, as an after-proof of their being ſincere therein, *i. e.* in that love of Peace, to which this ought to be ſubſervient.

And for my own part, I am willing thus to conſtrue it, and ſhould heartily rejoice to ſee this effect of it, that others would think of a like Agreement; I mean not, in piecing up for the ſtrengthening a Party, (if that ſhould prove the Secret here, we could not ſay, *The bleſſing of the Lord be upon you; we bleſs you in the name of the Lord*, Pſal. 129. 8.) but really Uniting in what may make for the Peace of all; I could wiſh bearing and forbearing, were the Eſtabliſh'd Principle of every Perſuaſion or Communion, and as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *Heb.* 10.24. we had *no other ſtrife, but to provoke unto love and to good works.*

Nor do I therefore enter into the private Sentiments of theſe hitherto ſeveral Perſuaſions; I do it not with reſpect ſo much as to the *Heads of Agreement, aſſented to by the United Miniſters*; nor do I think it neceſſary to the Agreement of or with any others, that all particularities ſhould be too nicely ſcann'd: Men may be of different Opinions, or at leaſt, differently expreſs themſelves, and yet all hold of the Foundation; the ſame ſort of Food may find different Appetites, and as different Digeſtions, and yet may make wholſome Chyle, beget ſtrength and growth in all that feed on it: And 'twould be hard, if becauſe of theſe differences in mens Conſtitutions, the good Phyſician, who ought to have the ſame tender-

tenderneſs for the health of all his Patients, ſhould from ſuch a diverſity, peremptorily determine one to be in a perfect ſtate of Health, another to labour of a Conſumption, or Plague, and forbid the others to converſe with them, for fear of the Infection; 'tis eaſie to make the Application; We are all, *as new born babes, to deſire the ſincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby*, 1 Pet. 2, 3. the common Nouriſhment for every Temper; but muſt we therefore (to follow the Alluſion) not eat together, becauſe we have not juſt the ſame Taſte and Reliſh of what is ſet before us.

This therefore is not what is ſo ſcrupulouſly to be attended in ſuch an Agreement, that men muſt juſt in every Punctilio, which however in it ſelf of leſs moment, yet may have been hitherto preſt to an extremity; and were I worthy to offer the Meaſures of a True, Chriſtian accomodation to any, it ſhould not be ſo much by endeavouring how to reconcile their different Sentiments, by taking them up Point by Point, and ſhewing which ought to be accepted, or retain'd; which to be condemn'd or rejected; as by preſſing an Accord in that which ought to be the Rule to them all; as knowing what is adviſed by the Apoſtle, *Phil.* 3. 15. *Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in*

any thing ye be otherwiſe minded, God ſhall reveal even this unto you.

Now what is it muſt be our Rule? Have we it not in our hands? Is it not the Goſpel to be received in the Simplicity thereof? And if ſo, Why do we differ in thoſe things which we have no Commiſſion from them to divide about? Saith the Apoſtle, 1 *Cor.* 11. 16. *But if any man ſeem to be contentious, we have no ſuch cuſtom, neither the churches of God.* And ſo the Aſſembly in their Annotations on that place; We have no ſuch Cuſtom, for the Church of God to contend about matters of this nature: 'Twas of their men praying with their heads covered, and the women with their heads uncovered, he had been ſpeaking; but from them proceeds to lay down this as a Rule in all matters of difference; and ſo it ſtands there applicable to what follows, as well as what precedes: And I perſuade my ſelf, I dare ſo far to Propheſie, That where ever men ſhall come to the right underſtanding of this (as the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, 1 *Cor.* 12. 31.) *more excellent way of Charity*; more Excellent (for that's the Logick of that place, as may be ſeen by looking into the Context); tho the beſt Gifts, the higheſt Attainments, whether in Tongue, or Propheſie, in underſtanding all Myſteries and Knowledge, and a Faith that can remove Mountains, *Chap.* 13. 1, 2.

(And

(And one would think theſe were ſufficient proofs of a true Church, wherever this ſhould be found; but it ſeems, much below that of Charity); Whenever men ſhall come to this Advance in their Religion, Peace and Union would ſoon follow, and the Bleſſings of both be the certain effect of that Agreement. Nor would there need any drawing up a ſcheme, or model of that in the ſeveral Heads to be accorded, where there ſhould in every man's breaſt be that *Urim* and *Thummim*, (Charity is both) which could not deceive him.

For ſuppoſe a man to be a Chriſtian, grounded in the firſt and general Principles of his great and good Maſter's Doctrine; ſuppoſe him acquainted with the true ſenſe of the Baptiſmal form) and the explication of that as far as 'tis clearly given in the Creed; (for I think nothing ſo prejudicial to the ſincerity of Truth, as the inſinuating matters Diſputable, into thoſe forms which are to conſiſt only of Fundamentals;) ſuppoſe him, if not able to explain himſelf, (for 'tis not neceſſary for every Chriſtian to be a Doctor of the Chair, a profound and ſubtile Philoſopher, and able to wade through all the Intricacies that men of deſign may have perplext truth with) in all the niceties of the Schools; yet at leaſt, with *Mary* and *Martha*,

Mary

Mary Magdalen, and the other Women that followed Chriſt, with the plain and untaught Diſciples; (for we find none of them all bred at *Gamaliel's* feet, but only St. *Paul* who was to have to do with men of Learning; the *Stoicks* and *Epicureans*, the Polite *Corinthians* and Quaint *Athenians*, and at their own Weapon to beat them out of all their Schiſms and Sects *to receive the truth in the love of it*, and to let that love, (as to their Lord, ſo to his Diſciples too,) be the comment on it; ſuppoſing, I ſay, but this, and what face can there be of dividing upon the Truth? What danger of making ſhipwrack of that Faith, where there ſhall be no Storms nor Tempeſts, to which mens boiſterous paſſions and turbulent diſputatious humour ſhall expoſe them? To ſpeak cloſer yet; What occaſion of dividing in Communion? I ſpeak not of what they ſhall herein do by choice; but where (as the phraſe hath obtained), they may be call'd to occaſional Communion, if they are convinced that the true Worſhip of God be kept in their reſpective Aſſemblies; the true Worſhip of God, I ſay, which is not tied to this or the other place, or way, but to the Spiritual ſincerity of thoſe, who with an honeſt and pure mind, what ever the manner of it be, adore God.

I muſt

I muſt confeſs, ſetting up Altar againſt Altar, muſt be needs highly provoking in the Eyes of God, becauſe 'tis love and concord that muſt Sanctify every Communion. Nor is that my meaning, as if where this were done, the Members of one way of Communion, were to ſhew their Charity by running in to thoſe of another; no, that might be to ſtrengthen the Schiſm and widen the breach: But what I hereby plead for, is, That what Communion ſoever, or Perſuaſion, men ſhall chuſe to be off, they would not do it in oppoſition, and out of a ſpirit of diviſion, but ſo as to be willing ſtill to own themſelves the Members of the Univerſal Church, whatever be the particular Church they ſhall joyn with: And were that the meaſure of mens actings, they might preſerve one without condemning another; they might approve all that is good in any, though they cleave to that in which they think moſt good things (and what is more for their Edification) are to be found. And I am apt to think this was what the Apoſtle aims at in the firſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians*, That however they might for ſome particular reaſon, one prefer *Paul*, another *Cephas*, another *Apollos*, yet that this ought not to be to the diſparaging of any of them, as if the Miniſtry of them all were not what they might have joyn'd with them in:

No,

No queſtion they might be very good Chriſtians, who joyn'd either with *Paul*, with *Cephas*, or *Apollos*; but if done to the prejudice of the Communion, kept up under either of the other, 'tis that which ſpeaks them *to be carnal, and to walk as men*, 1 Cor. 3. 3. Nay he goes farther; If Chriſt himſelf be pretended to be immediately depended upon, to the evacuating the uſe of the Miniſtry (for that ſeems to be underſtood by their being of Chriſt) 'twill be a Schiſm, and Diviſion, ſcarce compatible with being Chriſtians.

This therefore is what I would caution againſt, That in order to mens joining with one another, every Perſuaſion would take care, that they ſet not up themſelves in oppoſition to one another; for if that be done, there can be no Communion, no occaſional Communion, in which the Members of any other perſuaſion can partake with them. And this I take to be the deſign of what is delivered by the *United Miniſters* in the 4*th* Head of their Agreement; wherein they declare, *That known Members of particular Churches, may have occaſional Communion with one another, in the Ordinances of the Goſpel*, viz. *the Word, Prayer, Sacraments, Singing of Pſalms, diſpenſed according to the mind of Chriſt.* Nor would I ask any greater condeſcention in this matter, than that Chriſtians would thus

thus candidly bear it towards one another: For then I am ſure the difference would not be ſo great; but that however differing in Apprehenſions and Practices in ſome leſſer things, they muſt, even many of thoſe who have hitherto withdrawn from Communion with one another, own one another to be true Churches, (*Heads of Agreement*, 1. *par.* 2.) And the conſequence of that would be, to be ſo far from Cenſuring their Aſſemblies, as to comply and join with them, when thus call'd to it: And our Lord's Rule to the Woman of *Samaria*, would juſtifie the practice; who ſpeaking of the Times of the Goſpel, thus hath ſtated it, *Joh.* 4. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24. *Our fathers*, ſaid the Woman, *worſhipp'd in this mountain, and ye ſay, That in Jeruſalem is the place where men ought to worſhip.* There was the Controverſie, Where true Communion was to be had? and *Jeruſalem*, in the time of the Law, had the preference; for 'twas there God had put his Name, as may be ſeen, 1 *Kings* 9. 3. *But Jeſus ſaid unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye ſhall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jeruſalem, worſhip the Father; ye worſhip ye know not what*; there 'tis given againſt the *Samaritans*; *We know what we worſhip; for ſalvation is of the Jews.* But Salvation being of them, ſhall not now tye the Worſhip any more to *Jeruſalem*, than to any other place: *But the hour cometh*,

eth, and now is, when the true worſhippers ſhall worſhip the Father in ſpirit and in truth; for the Father ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him: God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth. Be the Worſhip in Spirit and Truth, if we own one another to be true Churches, we muſt grant it is, and we cannot (where Providence leads to it), refuſe the Communion with ſuch a Church.

This I ſay ſtill under that guard, That it muſt be where the Breach is not induſtriouſly kept up; where all Heats and Animoſities are drawing to an end; where there is no profeſs'd Separation, no deſign for Schiſm and Diviſion; as I would believe this *Agreement of the United Miniſters* to be. And methinks there ſhould be nothing ſtrange or new in this to him, who conſiders that 'tis but agreeable to what hath been the conſtant practice ever ſince the Reformation, among moſt of the Reformed, tho of different Denominations: Thus the Proteſtants of *France* with the Proteſtants of *England*; and the Proteſtants of *England* with thoſe of *France*, (I put the Inſtance there, becauſe that comes up to the particulars I have been inſiſting on) have frequently communicated without any the leaſt Scruple or Exception to their ſeveral Forms of Worſhip.

And I the more preſs this Inſtance, becauſe if it

it be allow'd, that on both ſides they have done well herein, 'twill remove that great *Mormo* as to the matter of the Miniſtry, and their Lawful Authority to preach and adminiſter the Sacraments; which has been the occaſion of ſo many fierce Diſputes, and yet lies as the great obſtacle in the way of ſuch a mutual Communion.

But (methinks) if a Condeſcention herein will open a door to that Charity we are pleading for, we ſhould not be ſo ſtiff in it, as thereby to overthrow all the poſſibility of Agreement; I am ſure, if we may make the practice of the Apoſtle our Example, (let me ſay, of our Apoſtle St. *Paul*, the Apoſtle of the *Gentiles*) we ſhall no longer do it: Now with St. *Paul*, *Some indeed preach Chriſt even of envy and ſtrife, and ſome alſo of good will. The one preach Chriſt of contention, not ſincerely, ſuppoſing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am ſet for the defence of the Goſpel. What then? notwithſtanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Chriſt is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice*, Phil. 1.15, 16, 17, 18. What? Rejoices the Apoſtle, that men preached Chriſt, tho of Envy and Strife, of Contention, and not ſincerely? And ſhall we put a ſtop to that Preaching, which pretends only to beat down Strife, Envy, Contention, and ſets up for the Sincerity and Simplicity of the Goſpel?

But what then? Shall all be licenſed? Shall they that run before they are ſent, be preſently run after, and without diſtinction attended to? I do not ſay it; but however, I would not be of thoſe that judge more uncharitably of any, than the Goſpel warrants: Let them ſtand and fall all of them to their own Maſter: We know our Lord's determination in the caſe, *Mark* 9. 38, 39, 40. *And John anſwered him, ſaying, Maſter, we ſaw one caſting out Devils in thy name, and he followeth not us, and we forbad him, becauſe he followeth not us. But Jeſus ſaid, Forbid him not; for there is no man which ſhall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly ſpeak evil of me; for he that is not againſt us, is on our part.* 'Tis our common employment to beat down the Power of the Devil, and caſt him out of Sinners; let us not envy one another the Succeſs of ſuch Undertakings: If Chriſt be preached, if the Devil be caſt out, it becomes us at leaſt to ſay in our Lord's words, *He that is not againſt us, is on our part.*

I do think the Function of the Miniſtry to be a diſtinct and ſacred Function; but I think the Goſpel, by which men are commiſſion'd to it, to be more Sacred; and whereever, in whatever mouth, under whatever difference of Adminiſtration, 1 *Cor.* 12. 5. I find that, I dare not but give it the Reverence that is due to the Doctrine

of

of my good Maſter: *Be it of envy, be it of ſtrife, be it of contention, be it in pretence, or in truth, yet if Chriſt is preached, therein I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*

I ſhould have greater Joy, and ſo ought every good Chriſtian to have, if there were no diviſion: and that which makes me thus willing to condeſcend, is, becauſe I hope 'tis the way that there may be none. For did thoſe who have hitherto been known under the name of *Diſſenters*, believe this were our Temper, this the Charity of the Church of *England*, I am ſure they would have one reaſon more, and that of the weightieſt import, not to differ from us.

Charity! Charity! Divine Charity! What would it not do, were it thoroughly embraced! As the Apoſtle ſays, 1 *Cor.* 13. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. *Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not it ſelf, is not puffed up, doth not behave it ſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinkeeh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things: Charity never faileth.*

And what excuſe can we have, if we let it not thus operate with us? For as the good St. *Paul* there goes on; St. *Paul*, than whom none was more inflam'd with this Divine Fire! *We know in part, we propheſie in part*; 'tis imperfect, the beſt

of

of all our knowledge, and therefore what ought to make us ready to bear with the Imperfections of one another; *We are all*, (St. *Paul* ſpeaks it in his own perſon, and I believe none of us will pretend to exceed him, whatever the Tongue we ſpeak with be, be it that of *men and angels*), *but as ſounding braſs, or a tinkling cymbal*, v. 1. if Charity give not the more articulate and intelligible ſenſe to what we ſpeak.

'Tis true, in the Preface to the Heads of Agreement, *p.* 1. 'tis declared, *againſt intermedling with the National Church-Form*: But I would take it to be done with that Candor and Sincerity, as not to ſuppoſe the *Uniting Brethren* thereby to inſinuate any Uncharitableneſs towards thoſe of that Form; and only, as a matter beyond their Sphere, to leave them in the quiet Poſſeſſion of what the Eſtabliſh'd Law gives them: And as they *diſclaim the impoſing their Terms of Agreement on others, all Coercive Power being* (as they add) *as unſuitable to their Principles, as to their Circumſtances*; ſo neither (whatever the Authority be, which the National Church-Form is ſupported with) will thoſe of it, I hope, be ſo rigid Impoſers, (for 'tis contrary to their Principles) as to offer any other Terms, than what the *United Miniſters* may eaſily accept of: The Terms of what is Doctrinal, they may; for themſelves, in the 8*th Head of Agree-*

Agreement, have allowed it to be agreeable to the Scriptures or Word of God, the perfect and only Rule of Faith and Practice: And as for what relates to *Diſcipline*, we know no Rule, but that it be for Decency, Order, and Edification; and if we do or would explain this no otherwiſe than is agreeable to the ſame Scriptures, I cannot tell why we ſhould not be heard.

But whether they can come up to us in this, or no, it ought not by their own Rule, to hinder the juſt exerciſe of their Charities towards us. For ſo they ſpeak (*Heads of Agreement* 1. *par.* 2.) *We agree, That Particular Societies of Viſible Saints, who under Chriſt their Head, are ſtatedly joined together for ordinary Communion with one another in all the Ordinances of Chriſt, are Particular Churches, and are to owned by each other, as Inſtituted Churches of Chriſt, tho differing in Apprehenſions and Practices in ſome leſſer things*: They are but leſſer things, we pretend them to be no other; the things on which we differ, are not of the Foundation; let not the Superſtructure make us forget who 'tis is the Corner-Stone, and what he has laid down as the Strength and Ornament of his Building, the very Character by which to diſtinguiſh thoſe who belong to it; *By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples*, ('tis a Character equally required in all) *if ye have love one for another*, John 13. 35.

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Methinks, I would hope, I might promiſe this for thoſe of the National Church-Form, there have been ſo many Overtures towards it. I am ſure 'tis our beſt Intereſt, as well as Duty, it ſhould be ſo; and if ſtill there be any among us, who are otherwiſe-minded, and have other Notions of the Conſtitution they are of, than what exactly ſuit with this, it will import them in this *Day of Peace*, (I would hope I might ſpeak in that ſtile) to conſider, Whether it be not the greateſt Wrong they can do to their Conſtitution, to expoſe it to the Conſtruction which ſuch a ſtiffneſs might raiſe in the minds of others.

For beſides, that the Wiſdom that is not Peaceable, peaceable in all the degrees and extent of the Word, is not from above, *James* 3. 17. So neither can it be expected it ſhould ſucceed below, I mean among thoſe, who after the ſad experience of what our Diviſions have led us to, are willing at length to follow the things that make for Peace; nay, cannot ſee any poſſibility of Eſtabliſhing the Conſtitution on any other Foundation: Upon which account I cannot but beſpeak it of thoſe above all men, who have hitherto been look'd upon as ſuch, who in the Pſalmiſt's Phraſe, *ſpoke for Peace*, Pſal. 120. 7. That they would not be now for War; let not them above all men, cry up any thing in the

defence of what is Temporal in the Church, to the prejudice of what is Spiritual: I think 'tis not difficult to unriddle my meaning herein; but leſt it ſhould be obſcure, it will become thoſe at the Helm to explain it; God and men, and their own Conſciences, muſt all riſe up in Judgment againſt them, if they be now ſlack in promoting what before they could only humbly offer at, but may now with Authority advance; which I hope all good men will; and that to ſuch a degree, as to remember, That if Self-denial be the Duty of every Chriſtian, 'tis theirs who have moſt to deny themſelves in: God, I hope, will give them Underſtanding in all things; if not, I doubt 'tis becauſe the Seaſon of ſuch a Bleſſing, is not yet come; becauſe We are not prepared to receive, nor They to convey it to us: And if that ſhould prove the caſe, what can be expected, but that farther and greater Diviſions ſhould ſtill happen in the Church? And that (I wiſh we find it not true) when 'tis too late, to the utter Ruin of the Conſtitution. I think Diviſions now naturally look towards it, and muſt inevitably ſo do, if we give our good God the Provocation to bring it on judicially.

If it be our fate, that there muſt ſtill be Hereſies among us, the Apoſtle hath told us the reaſon, 1 Cor. 11. 19. 'Tis *that they which are approved*,

ved, may be made manifeſt among us. Things are upon the *Criſis*, and God ſeems to be trying whether we will take out the leſſon to which his Providence leads; and I think it imports us to do it, whoever be the preſent Monitor to bring us to it. I would not ſay, *Fas eſt & ab hoſte doceri*; I would hope the being Enemies among Chriſtians, ſhould be at an end: And whereas the *United Miniſters* declare againſt intermedling with the National Church-Form, I could wiſh thoſe of that Form, would be content themſelves ſo far to intermeddle in this matter, as to follow the Pattern they have ſo happily ſet them, not only in ſuperceding all differences among themſelves, but whatever too have been between them, and thoſe who have too long gone under the name of *Diſſenters*; I mean, not by being inclin'd ſo much *to go over into the Perſuaſions and divided Intereſts of one another, as by making the Intereſt of all to be but one*: Love would do it, were this as much in our Hearts, as 'tis upon ſome of our Tongues; did we without diſſimulation *follow after the things that make for Peace, and things wherewith we may ediſie one another*, Rom. 14. 19. Peace is not ſo perverſe a thing, that it would not follow us.

But that's the unhappineſs, that what ever men talk of Union, yet for the moſt part nothing will

will ſerve them but to divide in the very proſecution of it; For what is it, in all ſuch projects that is by moſt generally aimed at, but the bringing others to their Party? *i. e.* They are well enough contented to be reconciled, if they may be humoured in what is the very ground of all differences, and others will but be ſo peaceable, as to come to their beck: But if any thing of which they are fond, is toucht on in the accommodation, then preſently there is no hopes of doing any good in the intended Condeſcention: No; the point is, What Party ſhall have the honour of bringing over the other to it, not who ſhall moſt unfeignedly yield up themſelves to the guidance of Truth, be it with this or the other, or with neither Party: For 'tis poſſible all may be in the wrong; they are ſo, whilſt Strife and Diviſion (upon what account ſoever) is kept up among them, ſaith our Lord, *John* 5. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and ſeek not the honour which cometh from God only*? If there be any by-end or carnal reſpect that influences men, any having our own, or other *mens perſons in admiration, becauſe of advantage*, Jude 17. There is little hopes ſuch ſhould ſubmit to Truth.

This therefore ſhould be the firſt *Proemial* in all meetings for Peace, That men come thither

with the moſt firm reſolution to yield up themſelves to the ſtanding Rule, by which all ought to walk; that whatever other intereſt or worldly deſign may have hitherto ſtood in the way, they will ſacrifice it to that Union, they pretend to advance; that they will no more think that any worldly greatneſs or profit ought to ſtand in the way now, than they did before themſelves were veſted in it; in a word, that they will meet as thoſe, who are reſolved *to hear what God the Lord will ſpeak*, as 'tis *Pſalm* 85. 8. For as it there follows, *he will ſpeak peace unto his people, and to his ſaints, i. e.* to thoſe who are his in all they do; and as his, have no ear open to any thing, but what is agreeable to the will of their Lord; who are his Saints, conſecrated and devoted to Holineſs; a word which ſignifies men taken off from all worldly and carnal aims, and from none ſo much, as what breaks that band and tye ('tis love is that band) by which they are his people. For is it not for the Communion of Saints, that we are called out of the World into the Church, in order to our Union, as with Chriſt our Head, ſo with one another, that we are made Chriſtians? And ſhall Chriſtians entertain thoſe differences among them, which are ſtill unchurching them? For 'tis not the being of this or the other particular or National Church, that will ſecure

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us in this prerogative of Saints, and the enjoyment of their Communion; unleſs, according to his direction, who is the Founder and Lord of the Church, we are one (ſo he prayed, and ſo he intended his Diſciples ſhould be, *John* 17. 21, 22.) as his Father is in him, and he in his Father. And I am ſure that is an *Oneneſs* that will admit of no Diviſion; if God and Chriſt cannot be Divided, neither can they who are to be one as they are one. *Ibid. v.* 23.

Nor can I therefore enough admire, what Notion of the Religion of our Lord they have, who can ſuffer themſelves to be ſo impoſed upon, as to think they ought to cry up any Conſtitution, (I ſpeak of what is humane, what is not Divine in it) to that height, as thereby to ſtop the compoſure, were even that in danger, where 'tis fairly call'd for: For as *Gamaliel* rightly argued, *Acts* 5. 38, 39. *If this counſel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.*

For my own part, I would be as zealous for the Conſtitution of which I am, as any other the moſt dutiful Son of the Church: But I think zeal and knowledge ought to go together. *Rom.* 10. 2. And that will tell me, it can be no diminution to a good cauſe to truſt it ſelf to a tryal by the word of Truth; no leſſening them

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that have it, to ſacrifice even what may otherwiſe be lawful, to peace: I am ſure ſo the Apoſtle determines, 1 *Cor.* 6. 12. *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.* And let us talk what we will of any thing elſe, till men come to that Temperament, as to let ſuch a Chriſtian Charity govern them in all things, *i. e.* thus to ſubmit the diciſion of all Controverſies, to what ought to have the only indiſputed deference, the ſimplicity of the Goſpel, and that Charity that ought every where to write the comment of it, we muſt not expect, That *the wolf ſhould lie down with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. And the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child lead them. And the cow and the bear to feed, and their young ones to lie down together. And the lyon to eat ſtraw like the ox, and the ſucking child to play on the hole of the aſp, and the weaned child put his hand on the cockatrice den. Or that they ſhould not hurt nor deſtroy in all God's holy mountain.* Iſa. 11.6,7,8,9.

And yet certainly this is a ſtate we are to look for; there is no doubt but there will be a time, when the Prophecy ſhall take place; I truſt it is at the door, and I am apt to believe, ſuch is the Proſpect I have of that Glorious Day when this ſhall be: He who waits to be gracious, *Iſa.* 30. 18.

30. 18. only ſtays for ſuch a Temper from us: *The glory of the Lord ſeems to be at the gate of the houſe*, Ezek. 43. 4. Let us no longer hinder its Entrance: What was it made this Glory to remove from the Church of the *Jews*? If we may judge of it by what muſt prepare their return, 'twas their Envy and Hatred of one another; for 'tis then, that the Envy of *Ephraim* ſhall ceaſe; *Ephraim ſhall not envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim*, Iſa. 11. 13.

I could enlarge on this Topick, and ſhew how 'twas Envy had ſo great an Ingredient in the heavieſt Judgment that ever befel that People; I mean the utter Ruin of their City, Temple, and Countrey; and to profeſs my own fears, there's nothing ſeems to me ſo dreadful a Prognoſtick of what may befal this poor Church and Nation, as the Envy and Diviſions that are, and have been among us: For as God ſpeaks by the Prophet ('tis a place is fit ſhould always ſound in the ears of thoſe who pretend to be the Sons of Peace) whatever the *Heads of Agreement* be on the one hand, whatever the Temperament men promiſe to come to on the other, *They ſhall heal the hurt of the daughter of my people ſlightly, ſaying, Peace, Peace, where there is no peace*, Jer. 6. 14. And none there can be, where men go not heartily, ſincerely, and with the Spirit of the Goſpel

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to the work; what can be expected, but as it there follows, *v.* 15. *Therefore they shall fall among them that fall; at the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, saith the Lord?* And visit them certainly God will; nothing but Judgment and Desolation can be look'd for, if this be their Temper; if, as before v. 13. *From the least of them even to the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsly.*

Not that I in the least question, but whatever of this may be our present lot, yet, as 'tis *Hos.* 6. 1, 2, 3. if we shall but say, *Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us, he hath smitten, and he will bind us up; after two days will he revive us, in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight; then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.* 'Tis not our offering at a composure, 'tis not our beginning the good work, unless we are resolv'd to follow it to its perfection; for then shall we know; as is promised *Isa.* 11. 9. *For the earth shall be full of the knowledg of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* 'Tis this Charity we are pleading for, and that is described in the foregoing verses, that will enlighten us for such a Knowledge.

I could wish there were no want of any further instruction to help us to take out the Lesson; but

but if we will not be otherwiſe taught it, why ſhould we hope our wiſe Father ſhould not reconcile us with his Rod: *Let us not deceive our ſelves, God is not mocked*; nor will it be ſufficient to have ſaid, a *confederacy to all them who ſhall ſay, a confederacy*, Iſa. 8. 12. No; as it there follows, *v.* 13. if we *ſanctifie not the Lord of hoſts himſelf, and let him be our fear and our dread*, we can look for nothing, but *to be broken*, *v.* 15.

God only knows what is the Scene his Providence hath reſerved for us; let us be ſure we follow on to know him, if we hope to have that Scene open upon us, that may make us happy: The eyes of the World, as well as of him who is our Omniſcient Judge, are upon us; and if we altogether (*for to heal the hurt of the daughter of his people ſlightly*, is no other) hold our Peace at this time, then ſhall there Enlargement and Deliverance ariſe to his Church from another place; but we and our Father's houſe, our Relations and Adherents, ſhall be deſtroyed; and who knoweth whether 'tis not for ſuch a time as this, that men from whom this will be ſo much expected, (let me ſo expreſs it) are come to the Kingdom, intruſted with Power, and have liberty to act freely for the Truth.

I would not detract from the Reputation of any, let men take care they do it not themſelves;

ſelves; For let them be aſſured, who have on both hands given us the hopes of great things; let them be aſſured, I ſay, if there be now any drawing back, any temporiſing for what end ſoever, 'tis not the higheſt and moſt ſanctified pretence that will leſſen the beam in their Eye; no, every mote in ſuch a ones Eye will be a beam; and if once they give men leave to think that 'twas any thing but God's Glory they aim'd at, any thing but Truth they had in chaſe, any thing but *the Law and the Teſtimony*, by which they will hereafter ſpeak, *Iſa.* 8. 20. any thing but the ſimplicity of the Goſpel they ſhall maintain; if the World be thus deceiv'd by them, their Eyes will be open to ſee the cheat, and as in the caſe of *Laodicea*, Rev. 3. 16. becauſe *they are thus lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, God* and the world will *ſpue them out of their mouth.*

But *we are perſuaded better things* of thoſe, whoſe buſineſs it is to promote peace, *and things that accompany Salvation*, Heb. 6. 9. *though we thus ſpeak.* The ſeaſon of it ſhould beſpeak it from them; the many changes and revolutions that have been on all hands, ſhould ſeem to tell us, it looks like the laſt opportunity we are to expect wherein to do it. I have only to conclude in thoſe compaſſionate words in which our beſt Lord, and Charitable Maſter, wept over *Jeruſalem*, ſaying,

ſaying, *If thou hadſt known, even thou at leaſt, in this thy day* ('tis but a day, and if not redeem'd, 'twill over) *the things which belong unto thy peace*; I would not pronounce what follows in his peremptory Stile, *but now they are hid*; but rather turn it into a Prayer, *May they never be hid from our eyes*; And let every good Chriſtian ſay, *Amen.*

F I N I S.